

## 1 Relating Freely

### *The Meaning of Educating for Equity and Diversity*

According to Buddhist teachings, although it is true that all things arise interdependently, the fruit of interdependence is not predetermined. Interdependence can be directed toward continued and ever more complicated trouble and suffering (*samsara*), or it can be directed toward meaningfully and sustainably resolving them (*nirvana*). Put somewhat differently, trouble and suffering are indices of errant interdependence or relationships gone awry; resolving our troubles and suffering means truing, or properly aligning, interdependence.

Contemporary patterns of global interdependence are in substantial need of truing. Even a cursory review of the past quarter-century makes bitterly apparent, for example, that globalization processes have not resulted in growing equity. Today, roughly 25 percent of the world's people are only barely able to meet their most rudimentary material needs, while another 20 percent live in conditions so abject that they afford no hope whatever of living even minimally dignified lives—a 50 percent increase since the late 1970s.<sup>1</sup> For far too many, the impossibility of making a meaningful difference in the quality of their own lives provides daily and deadening testimony to the compounding miseries that arise as interdependence goes further and further awry.

In what follows, I want to make the case that the tragedies of global poverty are intimately related to the global spread and deepening of educational crisis. This will entail telling a complex story relating the structures and direction of twenty-first-century global interdependence; deepening poverty and inequity both within and among societies; and mounting evidence that serious educational shortfalls are emerging at rates and intensities that outstrip any conceivable pace of educational reform. Far from being a story of hopeless capitulation, however, it is a story centered on locating what David Harvey has termed “spaces of hope” within the very pattern of conditions that now serve as engines of inequity.<sup>2</sup> As I hope to

make evident, the same realities that globally are driving education into crisis are also opening opportunity spaces for education to serve as a driver for reorienting global interdependence toward a coordinative achievement of ever greater equity and diversity.

### Education and Poverty Alleviation

Poverty alleviation and education are widely viewed as related, in the specific sense that there is simply *not enough* education available to the poor, who are thus blocked from fully participating in and benefiting from economic development. This mainstay of governmental and nongovernmental agendas for addressing poverty contains an indisputable measure of truth. At present, hundreds of millions of people have yet to be reached by formal education of any sort and lack even basic literacy and numeracy. The more critically relevant truths, however, are: first, that while any amount of education will undoubtedly improve the ability of individual poor to relate effectively with their situation, the primary causes of poverty do *not* lie within the poor themselves; and, second, that education along now globally standard lines will do little to true the patterns of local and global interdependence that do lie at the roots of poverty and that are sustaining economic growth and development by opening ever-widening beneficiary gaps both within and among societies. Education's lack of traction in addressing these wider conditions is not primarily a function of inadequate funding and access. Rather, it is an emergent function of genealogically shared values between the globally standard educational paradigm and the system of free-market economics that is a principal driver of global inequity.

We can begin fleshing out this claim by first considering briefly the linkages identified among poverty, development, and education by the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, and then reframing them in more strategically critical terms. According to Sen, while development is rightly regarded as crucial to alleviating poverty and its associated tragedies, expansion of individual agency or freedoms of choice, not economic growth, should be regarded as "the primary end and principal means of development."<sup>3</sup> Basing his conclusion on comparative historical evidence, Sen identifies education as the single most effective means of directly expanding the range and depth of agency individuals can exercise "to lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have."<sup>4</sup> Though education positively affects productivity and helps spur and sustain economic growth, Sen regards these as indirect benefits. The primary impact of education is increasing freedoms of choice: the direct alleviation of what he refers to as capability (as opposed to income) poverty. Economic growth is a happy but indirect consequence.

There is much that is appealing in Sen's analysis and his effort to subordinate the market values of productivity and growth to the human values of freedom and enhanced agency. The distinction between capability

poverty and income poverty, in particular, affords a very useful point of departure for rethinking poverty alleviation in more qualitative terms. But Sen's approach to linking poverty alleviation and education sheds scant explanatory or strategic light on the fact that, while contemporary patterns of global interdependence have been able to foster both remarkable economic growth and the rapid expansion of educational opportunities, these same patterns of interdependence have generated both globally increasing inequity and locally intensifying conditions for educational crisis. That is, his approach falls short of explaining the irony that sustained economic growth and market integration leaves the increasingly 'better educated' global poor *both* absolutely better off in terms of income and access to market goods and services *and* relatively worse off with respect to their share of global wealth.

This lack of critical traction reflects, in part, the global nature of Sen's overall argument and his inattention to the details of educational practice. But more important, it also reflects an insufficiently relational understanding of both poverty and freedom, and a failure to see how the interplay of market economics and education has come to express a relationally impoverishing codependency centered on the values of choice and control. In effect, to the extent that market-driven economic growth, development, and deepening interdependence leave the poor worse and worse off in relative terms, they are being left less and less favorably or valuably situated. In relational terms, they are worse off than in the past *even if* they are capable of exercising a wider range of choices. Bluntly stated, being relatively worse off is equivalent to being relationally disadvantaged. Heightened *freedoms of choice* do *not* guarantee becoming relatively better off and are indeed quite compatible with becoming less capable of *relating freely*.

Especially in the context of contemporary realities, the values of individual agency, choice, and control not only may do little to enhance the quality of our interdependence, they may be counterproductive to sustainably reducing inequity. The intimate linkage between rising inequity and deepening crises in education is ultimately axiological, depending much less on insufficient investment in education for the poor than on the fact that continued market growth requires a steady erosion of contributory capacities—a process in which education along globally standard lines has come ironically to play a progressively pivotal role. To engage critically the codependency of market economics and education, we must first develop the rudiments of a fully relational understanding of the interplay of poverty, capability, and freedom.

### Poverty as the Erosion of Relational Quality

The early Buddhist canon contains substantial resources for developing a relational conception of poverty. In the *Ina Sutta*,<sup>5</sup> poverty is initially depicted as an increasingly constraining relational dynamic afflicting those

who demonstrate a lack of conviction, conscience, concern, persistence, or discernment with respect to wholesome or skillful (*kusala*) mental qualities. As is made clear by the contrast of the poor, who are *dalidda* (literally, vagrant or without a place in the web of social interrelatedness) and monks and nuns who, while also “homeless” and dependent on begging for their subsistence, are termed *appicchata* or “content with little,” the relational breakdowns characteristic of poverty are *not* primarily a function of material lack. Instead, poverty is ultimately rooted in deficient and/or misdirected (*akusala*) patterns of attention that both result from and result in ignorance and errant patterns of relationship. Material deprivation is one possible effect of poverty, but not its cause.

The critical force of identifying poverty with errant (*akusala*) patterns of awareness or attention is powerfully drawn out in the *Sakkapañha Sutta*,<sup>6</sup> where the causes of conflict and malignity are traced back through jealousy and greed to fixed likes and dislikes, craving desires, dwelling persistently on things, and finally *papañca* or the mental proliferation of impediments. The key to liberation from *samsara* or the resolution of all suffering and trouble, including poverty, is “cutting through *papañca*” by carefully considering the relational eventualities resulting from any given pursuit, be it mental, emotional, social or physical. If a pursuit leads to both decreasing *akusala* eventualities and increasing *kusala* eventualities, *papañca*, or the mental proliferation of impediments, ceases: the roots of conflict are cut through. But should a pursuit lead to *akusala* eventualities persisting or increasing, even if *kusala* eventualities also obtain, the grounds for conflict continue to be well seeded: suffering will persist.

Importantly, the term *kusala* functions as a superlative. It does not designate things that are done “well enough,” but only those being carried out in a manner conducive to virtuosity. *Kusala* and *akusala* patterns of awareness and eventuality thus differ in terms of their qualitative *direction*—the former involving movement toward increasingly refined and creatively enriching presence, the latter toward increasingly crude and situationally impoverishing presence. In short, *kusala* conduct and eventualities express appreciative and contributory virtuosity—a capacity for enriching differences or differing in ways that make a valuable difference.

Poverty can be seen, then, as ultimately a function of situational blockages or mounting impediments (*papañca*) to making a meaningful difference and relating freely. In terminology drawn from the early Buddhist tradition, these blockages and impediments function as *āsava*: draining outflows of attention-energy into *akusala* or polluting and wasteful activity. Not only do they distract us from entering into truly enriching patterns of relationship, they habitually deplete us of the resources needed to orient our interdependence as a whole toward the liberating resolution of trouble and suffering.<sup>7</sup>

Poverty, in short, is a mark of ignorance or deficient attunement—a measure of incapacity for responding or being responded to as needed. Pov-

erty means not having anything relevant to offer, being in no position to appreciate or add value to one's situation. Yet, as the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* makes clear,<sup>8</sup> while poverty arises with failures to discern how we can concretely contribute, in ways that are *kusala*, to the patterns of relationship constituting who we are as persons and communities—failures of both insight and imagination—alleviating poverty cannot be accomplished simply by giving more to “the poor.” Poverty ultimately indexes a situational failure to appreciate the distinctive differences of all beings—a pattern of interdependence that fails to draw out each being's enriching capacities and that ultimately affects and afflicts all who are present.

In sum, poverty can be seen as an index of compromised or collapsed *diversity*, where diversity consists of self-sustaining and difference-enriching patterns of mutual contribution to meaningfully shared welfare. Strategies for poverty alleviation which are not ecological in the sense of addressing the meaning or direction of an impoverishing situation as a whole—strategies that identify poverty with people who are poor rather than with relational impediments and inequities—are doomed to failure. Yet, this is precisely the type of poverty alleviation that is afforded by the globally dominant educational paradigm—a paradigm that focuses on inculcating market-relevant competencies rather than appreciative and contributory virtuosity.

### Curriculum and the Karma of Control

Over the last two hundred years, formal (especially public) education has come to be carried out globally as the sequentially structured transfer/acquisition of information and knowledge; as a systematic means of inculcating circumstantially relevant competencies; and as a forum for principle- or rule-based character development and socialization.<sup>9</sup> This educational paradigm did not develop independently, but rather took shape as a function of sustained convergences, across a wide range of domains, on the values of control, universalism, autonomy, and equality—a legacy of what Stephen Toulmin has termed the second phase of modernity.<sup>10</sup>

These convergences evidence a distinctive karma or pattern of values-intentions-actions and associated outcomes and opportunities that began developing in the late sixteenth century and that crossed an important threshold in the turbulent decades of the early- to mid-seventeenth century as religious, political, and social conflict in Europe reached devastating intensities. At the same time, innovations in science and engineering were ushering in what has been referred to as a “control revolution”<sup>11</sup> that has radically affected societal structures and been a factor in the growth of both global market economics and standardized education to the present day. The result was a distinctive interweaving of political, socioeconomic, scientific, and technological ideals, institutions and practices expressing the legitimacy of segregating reason, mind, and theory from emotion, body,

and practice; of asserting the inherent danger or irrelevance of difference; and of seeking an isomorphism of cosmic, political, social, and epistemic orders.

The ubiquitous association of education with curriculum neatly illustrates the modernist heritage of the dominant educational paradigm. "Curriculum" was first used in an educational context in the late sixteenth century by Peter Ramus.<sup>12</sup> Prior to this, education was associated with the activities of a *studio*—hence the word student—in which a master of a particular knowledge domain engaged in sustained dialogue with individual apprentices. Education was not presumed to be a programmed affair limited by fixed procedures or set timetables, but rather a lifelong, highly individualized, and largely improvised endeavor. Ramus innovatively claimed that knowledge could be mapped, that its transmission could be logically and universally ordered or methodized, and that education not only could but also *should* follow a particular and explicitly terminal course. The term *curriculum* captures this perfectly, originally denoting a circular racecourse of standard length used to order the competitive movement of charioteers.

With the notion of a curriculum, Ramus forwarded an understanding of knowledge as a quantifiable and deliverable good most efficiently and effectively transferred by means of standard instructional sequences building up from epistemic simples to culminate in predetermined ends. Students came to be seen as travelers coursing through generic curricula and acquiring specific bodies of knowledge and competence by methods at once expressing and transferring their deep structure.

The emergence of control as a key value against a background of intensifying international competition intimately informed the emerging paradigm of education based on the disciplined completion (that is, consumption) of methodically delivered, standard curricula.<sup>13</sup> Shaped as well by the modern values of universality, autonomy, and equality, this paradigm matured in interdependence with other distinctively modern institutions, including the nation-state and the global commodity, labor, and consumer markets.

Not surprisingly, as colonial and industrial expansions began to falter with the onset of diminishing returns on investment in the early- to mid-twentieth century, education was explicitly drafted into the training of market-ready labor forces. The industrialization of education reached such intensity, especially in the United States, that influential educational theorists frankly advocated reorganizing schools in keeping with the new science of efficiency that was then being used to rationally restructure factories and management organization. Students were identified as "raw material," which schools were to transform into uniform "finished products" over set periods of time: workers with market-relevant competencies and a high tolerance for discipline.

In spite of theoretical challenges to control-biased modern curricula from a variety of perspectives—and in spite of widespread postmodern

dissolutions of modern political, economic, and social institutions—formal educational institutions have changed remarkably little since the early twentieth century. Indeed, biases toward controlled progress and standards are now undergoing a remarkable resurgence wherever they had been temporarily eclipsed—a resurgence tied to growing convictions that education has become both seriously decoupled from patterns of global change and institutionally inefficient. Worldwide, public school systems are being seen as categorically entrenched failures unresponsive to rapidly shifting market needs. Unfortunately, what truth there is in seeing educational institutions as out of step with contemporary realities is being ironically overwritten with default reaffirmations of controlled, standard curricula and intensifying assertions of the market values of competition and choice as avenues for substantive educational innovation. In the context of contemporary patterns of complex change, reforming education to better deliver populations that embody market-determined competencies is a blind step backward on a path that is steadily and, in all likelihood, irreversibly eroding.

### Complex Change: Emergence, Convergence, & the Centrality of Values

Present-day rates, scales, and patterns of change are bringing about global systems of interdependence that are not merely complicated but complex.<sup>14</sup> Distinctively, complex systems are both *autopoietic* (self-creating or self-organizing) and *novogenous* (or innovation-generating)—recursively structured systems that not only take place in history, but for which history makes a difference. Developing in ways that are at once typical and responsive to the effects on their environment of their own behaviors, complex systems are manifestly dispositional in nature, expressing ongoing negotiations between relatively abiding value sets and relatively changeable factual conditions—negotiations that invariably demonstrate the interplay of both "upward" and "downward" causalities.<sup>15</sup> Finally, and perhaps most important, complex systems are prone to nonlinear development, changing in ways that in retrospect will appear consistent with their own values and histories, but that in principle could *not* have been anticipated.<sup>16</sup> The dynamics of complex realities cannot be exhaustively accounted for on the basis of so-called initial conditions and the operations of natural laws.

The emergence of truly complex realities across the full spectrum of human endeavor is thus synonymous with increasing indeterminacies regarding the *meaning* or *direction* of change. Moreover, as complex systems evolve and become interdependent, so do their informing values. In effect, the growth or evolution of complex systems is inseparable from generating and consolidating meaning. How well or how errantly (and conflictingly) complex systems evolve and interact finally turns on how meaningfully their distinct value systems accord both with one another and with changing situational dynamics. In responding to complex change, the responsive value of control is best subordinated to commitment.

Complexity implicates us in patterns of interdependence that are not merely factual, but rather deeply informed by historically ramifying values. In Buddhist terms, the dynamics of complex interdependence are karmic, eventuating in outcomes and opportunities that reflect patterns of consonance and dissonance among interactive lineages of values-intentions-practices. Thus, contemporary globalization is—surprisingly, for some—resulting in a highlighting of both commonalities *and* differences, with global institutional convergence, for example, being paralleled by global fragmentations along linguistic, ethnic, or religious lines. The strategic shift from control to commitment is mandated in part, then, by the need to grapple with the simultaneously universalizing and pluralizing, value-driven dynamics of global interdependence.

Unlike control, which can be shared only on the basis of limited input by all those vested in it, commitments not only can be shared multilaterally and simultaneously, they allow full and mutually augmenting engagement by all. Whereas the predominance of control as a strategic value in responding to global convergence is consonant with a pluralism that valorizes secure coexistence and identifies increasing plurality with increasing variety, a strategic emphasis on commitment fosters approaches to pluralism that valorize coevolution as a process of jointly improvising the coordination or mutual ordering of distinctly differing values and practices—a process through which increasing plurality becomes synonymous with enhanced diversity.

### *From Problems to Predicaments*

But the mandate for subordinating control to commitment also derives from a crucial paradigmatic shift in the kind of difficulties, trouble, and suffering associated with truly complex global interdependence: an ongoing, epochal transition from an era of problem solution to one of predicament resolution. In brief, problems develop when changing circumstances render existing practices ineffective for meeting continuing needs and interests. Problems signal the failure of specific means for arriving at ends we intend to keep pursuing. Solutions thus consist of removing factual blockages in a given and still desirable pattern of situational development or meaning: improved or novel means for arriving at abiding ends. Predicaments, on the other hand, arise as situational blockages or troubles occasioned by the co-presence of contrary patterns of development or meaning. Predicaments signal a situated (rather than theoretical or ideal) incompatibility of ends and interests—the emergence of dramatic impasses or value conflicts centered on the direction of interdependence in a given situation. Predicaments are therefore not open to solution, but rather only to resolution.<sup>17</sup>

“Resolution” is intended here to carry a dual sense. First, it is a measure of detail and refinement regarding insight into situationally relevant

patterns of interdependence and their complex dynamics. Second, it marks clarity of purpose or meaning combined with responsive flexibility. Resolution implies, then, negotiating deep and detailed attention to the factual dynamics of a given situation and clarity of commitment with respect to harmonizing situationally complex flows of meaning and valuation.

A signal effect of increasingly complex global interdependence is an accelerating conversion of problems into predicaments. To take a single example, despite rising global wealth, global hunger is at a historical peak and growing, with nearly one billion people now chronically hungry. The combination of increasing global wealth and global hunger points, at the very least, to the inequity of prevailing patterns in the distribution of new wealth. But inequities in the distribution of wealth reflect karma or patterns of value-intention-action that are ramifying in complexly interdependent ways politically, socially, and culturally, not just economically. It is to our global karma that we must look in order to explain how global hunger continues to rise even as there is a rise in global food surpluses. People do not go hungry because of food shortages, but because their suffering is considered a lesser “cost” than that of restructuring the production and distribution of food. Global hunger is not a problem; it is a predicament.

Advances in science and technology have yielded such extensive and precise capacities for control that very little other than insufficient time, money, and commitment blocks us from solving whatever factual problems lie between us and the living of decent lives by all. Given this, mounting global inequities and the persistent elusiveness of a decent life for all must be seen as rooted ultimately in the complexion of our abiding values and priorities. We have crossed a threshold beyond which it is no longer possible seriously to question whether we *can* address these conditions, but only whether we will resolutely affirm that it is *worth* doing so and then *how well* we follow through to that end.

In transiting from an era of problem solution to one of predicament resolution, we are compelled to recognize the primacy of relationality and the irreducibly directed or meaning-laden nature of interdependence. But we are also compelled to recognize the crippling incompleteness of any body of knowledge restricted to knowing-that and knowing-how. Epistemic wholeness depends on the inclusion of knowing-to or the exercise of wisdom. Yet at the same time, because complex interdependence is conducive both to the emergence of novel or unanticipated outcomes and opportunities, and to the convergence of distinctive systems of values and ends, the unsettling reality is that predicament resolution cannot be effectively undertaken from any fixed position. Skillfully responding to complex, predicament-generating change requires virtuosity in innovatively improvising shared pathways for revising relational qualities and coordinating interests across ever-escalating numbers of domains and scales.

Taken altogether, the concrete ramifications of complex interdependence, nonlinear change, and the transition from an era of problem solu-

tion to predicament resolution constitute a forceful imperative for decisively turning away from the modernist conception of education as a controlled delivery of specific, predetermined and standardized bodies of knowledge and skills. The emerging realities of the twenty-first century demand a concerted shift toward education focused on innovatively fostering capabilities for responsive virtuosity and commitments to shared meaning-making. Doing so, however, in any sustainable and effective manner will require breaking the codependency of market economics and education.

### ***Market Dynamics and the Educational Challenge of Alleviating Poverty***

The global market economy has come to be the single most important complex system affecting the direction deepening interdependence is taking, and one that strikingly brings to light the importance of subordinating problem solution to predicament resolution. It is also the single greatest threat to the personal and communal resources needed to critically assess and skillfully orient global interdependence away from increasing inequity—a threat with considerable implications for educational change.

Over the past four hundred years, market dynamics have evolved in parallel with a series of paradigmatic shifts in global politics and economics. These major transitions in the meaning of power, production, and consumption, and their pattern of interrelatedness, can be described as modality shifts from the feudal to the colonial; the colonial to the developmental; the developmental to the informational or epistemic; and the informational to the attentional.<sup>18</sup> Enabling and orienting these transitions has been a compounding lineage of technologically triggered efficiencies, based on the value of control, that removed geographic and temporal constraints on the expansion of markets, decisively affected their content, and strongly linked market growth to materializing the ordinal values of convenience and choice.

For present purposes, the most salient points in the history of market economics center on the relationships among market growth, market content, and the contributory capacity of the consuming public. At once stimulated by and sustaining the control revolution in technology and competition among newly consolidating nation-states, resource and commodity markets have grown with remarkable rapidity. With the attainment of global *market reach*, growth dynamics have shifted away from geographic expansion to intensifying *market density* through a controlled faulting of the familiar. In effect, this meant the creation of *akusala* eventualities through the systematic proliferation of needs, situational blockages, and difficulty domains capable of being addressed by market-designed and -delivered commodities. Most visibly through direct and indirect advertising, the resultant economy of dissatisfaction has institutionalized deepening disenchantment with the ordinary—the normalization of living circumstances that are not only subject to remarkable control but also in

increasing need of it. Economic growth came to depend on generating novel needs or problems open to market solutions—a process involving the massive conversion of productive and contributory diversity into increasingly various opportunity arrays for consuming market commodities.<sup>19</sup>

Consuming market-delivered commodities to meet virtually every basic human need has undeniable advantages in terms of convenience and choice. But convenience and choice come at considerable cost in terms of relational depth. This is most readily illustrated in connection with the temporal compression of the production-consumption-waste cycle that is a part of the dynamics of global market growth. In short, the intensity of consumption that is needed to continue fueling overall market growth systematically undermines the conditions for *kusala* or virtuosity-enhancing patterns of engagement with our own immediate situations and development. The undeniable freedoms associated with living under contemporary global regimes of market economics literally compel further freedoms to conveniently control or manage the content of our individual experiences by choosing—as continuously as possible—among market-designed and -delivered commodities, which are then as quickly as possible relegated to either real or metaphorical landfills, recycling plants, and combustion sites. Consumers produce waste.

This is not innocent employment. The compulsive exercise of convenient freedoms of choice is not a linear process, but rather a cycle that ramifies karmically. Market growth at present scales and densities necessarily diminishes diversity—immediately eroding self-sustaining relations of meaningful contribution to shared welfare, because markets not only produce goods and services for global circulation, they also produce people in need of such goods and services. Karmically, getting good at getting what we want necessarily entails also getting good at wanting—being left unfulfilled by having gotten what we wanted. The cycle is vicious, in spite of being one through which we are enabled to exercise increasing control and choice with respect to the content of our experience. To be able to benefit from the solutions afforded by market commodities, we must be the kind of people who experience our situation problematically, as often and as intensely as possible.

In spite of generating incredible wealth, variety, and freedoms of choice, contemporary market growth, ironically, depends on undermining capacities for relating freely and differing in ways that truly make a difference, fostering *akusala* patterns of relationality or sensibilities and sensitivities ill-suited to directly enhancing the quality of our interdependence. The single most important—indeed, indispensable—externality or by-product of liberally and globally institutionalized market economics is relational impoverishment.

Herein lies the tragedy of the codependence of market growth and education. The growth of global markets has not only been driven by, but has been a primary driver of, expanding and deepening social, political, and



cultural interdependence and complexity. Yet, the spread and deepening of markets depends upon undermining the very personal and communal capacities needed for undertaking skillful improvisations of shared meaning across plural domains of fact and value in the resolute achievement of enhanced equity and diversity—the very capacities mandated by the emergence of truly complex realities and nonlinear change.

### The Liability of Competency

To the extent that education remains wedded to the idea of a set curriculum of standardized materials delivered to effect predetermined acquisitions of market-relevant competencies, education will not prove effective in addressing relational poverty and levels of inequity that have already reached globally scandalous levels. Neither will it prepare students appropriately to engage the emerging realities of truly complex interdependence. Education must decisively break away from its modern legacy of valuing control. But it must just as decisively refrain from undertaking purportedly “postmodern” reforms aimed either at meeting present or anticipated market needs or at restructuring education in market-inspired ways.

Some will immediately object that the contemporary market itself demands innovation and creativity and is thus compatible with education that aims at enhancing capacities for relating freely. But this objection, while valid with respect to a very restricted global population, overlooks the global reality that contemporary markets also demand the production of a maximally large and variegated body of consumers that is deficient enough in its capacity for imagination, innovation, and improvisation to be almost continuously in need of expertly designed and delivered commodity solutions for problems that would otherwise be experienced as effectively intractable. This body of consumers, however, is also the basic source of labor needed to effectively animate increasingly rationalized, global production regimes—regimes in which the vast majority of workers contribute little other than the most qualitatively rudimentary effort and energy. For the global majority, training for market competence amounts to a systematic erosion of potentials for situationally apt, creative engagement.<sup>20</sup>

Competence consists of the ability to engage effectively and reliably in a given activity. Education biased toward competencies aims at a controlled enabling of people to embody specific capacities relevant to meeting present, context-determined needs, as well as future needs that can reasonably be anticipated. Education biased toward standard competencies is, then, education that valorizes sufficiency—an emphasis on learning what is *necessary* and being enabled to perform *well enough* what is presently seen as necessary to be done.

In some ways, this is a highly “democratic” biasing of education. Methodically educating for a range of basic competencies through stan-

dardized curricula—quite unlike the “elitist” bias of premodern studio apprenticeships that was directed toward the pursuit of particular excellences—is quite compatible with mass public education. To the degree that a given competency marks a minimal capacity for contributing to the fulfillment of some present or anticipated need, a standardized curriculum focused on a set of universally valuable competencies, open (at least ideally) to all, delivers a quite clear public good. Indeed, there is no disputing that competency-biased education historically has played an inestimable role in global modernization and in the transition to so-called postindustrial modes of economic growth. By facilitating critical masses of technical and engineering expertise especially in developing societies, it has both directly and indirectly done much to improve basic quality of life. The correlation, noted by Sen, of formal education with extended average lifespan and expanded life opportunities is not to be denied.

Yet the history of mass education aimed at raising competitive skill levels among the general public has also been inseparable from the mass production of a generically competent labor force. It has, in effect, been education oriented toward institutionalizing *universal standards* in the service of market needs, not toward enhancing the distinctive virtuosities of *unique students*. Whatever its past merits, twenty-first-century realities are rendering this educational bias toward competence increasingly counterproductive—a counterproductivity most strikingly evidenced by the rising volume with which “lifelong learning” is being touted as the answer to globally intensifying educational crises. The now dominant orientation of schools and schooling toward broadly standardized sets of competencies has crossed the threshold of its own utility to begin generating problems of the sort that it is especially suited to solving.

As long as situational needs are well established or shifting in relatively predictable ways, and as long as these needs reflect continuously abiding values and norms, competence-biased education can prove to be both adequate and efficient. But when situational needs are rapidly shifting and reflect often quite complex confluences among distinct and frequently contrary sets of values and norms, this is no longer the case. A singular ramification of deepening complex interdependence is that present needs are not just moving targets, but targets that are moving unpredictably and unrhythmically. Under such circumstances, curricula oriented toward inculcating set competencies that must be developed over a substantial period of time cannot avoid marginalizing the relevance of education in direct proportion to the amount of time required to move through them.

The now almost standard answer both from the market and from within the educational establishment—an answer very much in keeping with initiatives to privatize education—is to move decisively to a model of lifelong, on-demand education. Emphasizing consumer choice and keen attunement to market demands, such a model is not incidentally analo-

gous to on-site, on-demand fast-food delivery: education that is cheap, convenient, concretely beneficial, and yet ultimately compromising. In the context of complex twenty-first-century realities, merely “competent” responses are highly liable to introduce drag into the overall pattern of situational development: whatever is now “good enough” is without warning prone to becoming “*not* good enough.” In sum, educational systems focused on delivering presently relevant skills and knowledge are highly susceptible to institutionalizing competency traps that compromise responsive virtuosity and that heighten frictions between available attentive and responsive resources and actual needs.

These frictions are, of course, disastrous in their impacts upon affected populations—those whom education fails to equip with the sensitivities and sensibilities needed to alleviate, and perhaps even eliminate, their relative disadvantage and poverty. Yet, to the degree that education is reformed subject to market pressures and protocols, the ensuing problems will quite profitably extend and deepen the markets for still further education. To paraphrase Ivan Illich, to the extent that education is commodified, it will fare ever less well in alleviating poverty, because it will instead be institutionalizing ever-growing classes of the relationally disadvantaged or poor—populations ever in need of further education. *Lifelong learning* must be very clearly differentiated from already powerful market imperatives for normalizing *lifelong schooling*, which amounts to the lifelong dependence of educational consumers on commodities delivered with maximal control and convenience in the service of compelling profitable exercises of individual agency and choice.

The more effectively we “solve” our educational “problems” from *within* existing patterns of education/market codependency, the greater will be the educational and other predicaments we find ourselves facing. Many of these predicaments will only become manifest outside of the educational sector, in the larger systems of interdependence within which education is comprised. Indeed, as previously disparate individuals and communities are brought into intimate and transformative interdependence, meeting *our* needs necessarily involves confronting questions of a moral or ethical nature, going beyond mere tolerance to improvise robustly shared sets of values while at the same time conserving (at least some) differences as the basic conditions for making meaningful differences to and for one another.

Education that fails to prepare individuals and communities to engage in such mutually enriching relationships, concretely enhancing both diversity and equity, will disadvantage them relationally. The realities of globally complex interdependence compel innovating innovatively, establishing common commitments with respect to meeting our needs in a fully coordinated—rather than competitive or merely cooperative—fashion. Education that does not foster coordinative virtuosity is, finally, impoverishing.

### From Competence to Virtuosity: Toward a Pluralistic Educational Ethos

To the extent that education remains coupled to the dominant karma of ever-intensifying global markets, it will fail to induce and enhance the capacities-for and commitments-to *kusala* patterns of relationality that alone promise the elimination of poverty. Urging privatization and market-like competition among schools as a solution to our competency-biased education woes is (knowingly or unknowingly) to advocate for the duplication in education of disparities already strikingly manifest in the quality of other market-delivered goods and services.

What, then, is the alternative? What, if any, are the common features of educational paradigms that can be responsive to the complex realities of nonlinear emergence and global convergence, and capable of orienting the dynamics of global interdependence resolutely away from inequity?

At the very least, any such paradigm must foster education that both demonstrates and enables innovating innovatively. Education must also be resolutely diversity enriching. That is, it must be generative of the sensibilities and sensitivities needed to appreciate difference by contributing distinctively to realizing intimately and yet concretely shared welfare under unpredictably changing circumstances. Finally, education must embody patterns of values-intentions-actions that will yield learning outcomes and opportunities related to alloying wisdom and compassion. Failing to do so is to fail systematically at extirpating the basic conditions for the increasingly inequitable distribution of the benefits of global change and interdependence.

More specifically, if education is to responsibly engage and thrive within contemporary realities, a basic shift must be made from relying almost exclusively on *curriculum* approaches structured in accord with the values of control, competition, and choice, to developing a pluralistic educational ethos that exemplifies and engenders the valorization of commitment, coordination, and contributory virtuosity. The curricular mode of associating learning with “getting it,” or taking possession, must be abandoned in favor of a *studio*-inspired association of learning with ongoing, situationally improvised and resolutely enriching relational maturation. Such an understanding counters the modernist severance of mind/reason and body/emotion, affirming that learning is always both bodily and social praxis: the activity of a thinking body as a nexus of qualitatively transforming social and natural relationships.

Importantly, revising education to facilitate opening up “spaces of hope” within twenty-first-century realities is a project of relational transformation that can only be initiated within present situational dynamics. Indeed, it is a project that can only be sustained by activating and coordinating potentialities *within existing situational resources* for meeting the challenges posed by complex interdependence and nonlinear change. As global as are the conditions that make new educational paradigms neces-



sary, these paradigms cannot be universal in either origin or intent; they can only be homegrown.

This said, it must be stressed that as contemporary patterns of globalization render porous every "border" imaginable—geographic, social, economic, and political, but also personal and cultural—the relational patterns constitutive of learning, home, and community become correspondingly "borderless." In a complexly interdependent world, "home" becomes less exclusive and more explicitly ecological—a dense nexus of intimacies shading off without natural limit. Truly being "at home" means, almost paradoxically, being ever more radiantly concerned. Demonstrated compassion is a key measure of successful educational innovation.

Three important implications ensue. First, educational innovation is a task that cannot effectively be undertaken as "mine" or "yours," but only as "ours." Second, there can be no illusions about educational innovation being a task to be summarily comprehended and completed—something to "get done" once and (hopefully) for all. Successful educational change involves establishing shared vectors for reorienting how we are interdependent—an ongoing and ever-ramifying practice. Finally, caution must be taken in too closely associating education with heightened capacities for individual agency or choice. While it is undoubtedly much better to have options for exercising freedoms of choice than to lack them altogether, choice alone is not enough to guarantee lives worth living. The *power* to choose to do or get what one wants is not the same as the *strength* needed to be truly unblocked by any circumstance—a strength that arises only out of mounting relational maturation and virtuosity.

### *Virtuosity as Educational Aim*

There is notable and yet legitimate vagueness in this vision of educational transformation. In a context of nonlinear change, where responding from any fixed position rapidly becomes counterproductive, resolute flexibility and underdetermined patterns of engagement are significant strengths. Exhaustively prescriptive approaches to educational transformation—especially approaches with pretensions of universal applicability—are now simply unrealistic and almost sure to do more harm than good.

From within the globally dominant educational paradigm, innovation is generally assumed to occur as a trajectory of predetermined *outcomes*—a mapping, whether simple or complicated, of controlled achievement. Whatever short-term, small-scale successes such a "curriculum" approach to innovation might have, it is ultimately at odds with the realities of complex change and interdependence—realities that commend undertaking innovation as a continually improvised generation of relationally enriching *opportunities*. Innovation is not a function of sequenced solutions and desired *destinations*; is a function of deepening resolution and recursively opening *directions*.

Also in this vision of educational transformation, however, is a disturbing aura of elitism. Committing to alleviate poverty through education may, as argued above, involve dissolving the codependency of market growth and education, as well as challenging the bias toward competencies presently or soon to be in demand. But it is impossible to imagine alleviating poverty by way of any educational paradigm that is not firmly committed to education for all. Insisting that education be oriented toward virtuosity, rather than the more modest aims of specific competencies, is in apparent tension with this most rudimentary commitment.

This tension is, I think, a function of inadequately distinguishing between being-able-to-do-whatever-one-wants—*freedom as power*—and being-unblocked-by-any-circumstances—*freedom as strength*.<sup>21</sup> The former expresses commitment to the ultimate reality of individually existing beings and the centrality of choice; the latter emphasizes the irreducibly relational nature of all things and the primacy of situationally apt, interactive genius.<sup>22</sup> Freedom, in other words, is adverbial in nature: a demonstrated capacity-for and commitment-to *relating freely*.

The contrast of competence and virtuosity must be understood in this context. Virtuosity is not a function of coming into individual possession of some set of consummate abilities. Instead, virtuosity arises as a distinctive, resolutely appreciative quality of contribution associated with superlative expressions of insight into relational dynamics, situational attunement, and aptness of response. In Buddhist terms, virtuosity is the meaning or expressed function of cultivating wisdom (*prajñā*), attentive mastery (*samādhi*), and moral clarity (*śīla*). Virtuosity implies a resolutely *kusala* pattern of situational engagement—a pattern of engagement that yields continuously liberating outcomes and opportunities. Virtuosity is not something anyone possesses; it marks a qualitatively transformative *heading toward* truly strengthening interdependence.

Virtuosity, understood as the demonstrated meaning of relating freely, is not restricted to the very few or to the extramundane. It can be expressed in even the most ordinary conversations, in cooking, in building a home, and in carrying out daily chores or professional duties. As a relational quality, virtuosity is not a goal—an end or destination to be strived for. Nor does it manifest as a means useful for arriving at some independent end. Virtuosity is, instead, the situationally specific opening up of appreciative difference.

Education, then, is not to be understood as a means to some separate end—even that of diversity or the alleviation of poverty or greater equity. Instead, education must directly express or demonstrate the meaning of diversity, the alleviation of poverty, and greater equity. And, if the story I have been telling is true in the sense of being capable of serving to help correct or realign presently prevailing patterns of global interdependence and change, these are not ultimately separate aims. Enhancing diversity, alleviating poverty, and bringing about greater equity are distinctive dimensions

of the meaning of reorienting global interdependence away from compelling freedoms of choice and ever-expanding and deepening abilities for control toward ever more resolute commitments to relating freely while mutually contributing to shared welfare. Virtuosity is the expression of such commitments—commitments that are ever possible as homegrown responses to the predicaments of complex and increasingly global contemporary realities.

### Concluding Remarks

To invoke a Buddhist analogy, the task of those who would revise education to respond to twenty-first-century realities is like that of the bodhisattva who compassionately commits to entering into liberating relationships with all beings, fully aware that this commitment has infinite scope and that no “others” will ever “be liberated.” The bodhisattva vow is ultimately one of revising the *meaning* of our situation so that our very interdependence itself continuously expresses liberating dynamics. Thus, the seventh-century Chan master Hongren stated that “the true body of the Buddha is all sentient beings”—a “body” that consists of enlightening or liberating patterns of relationality. A century later, Chan master Mazu declared the reciprocal truth that “the wondrous functioning of the myriad things are all one’s true body.” It is this fully extended conception of the body as a nexus of horizonless interdependencies that must be appealed to in ultimately thinking through the educational implications of rapidly compounding and markedly errant global interdependence. In non-Buddhist terms, the “educated body” must ultimately be understood as a “body politic”—not as the body of any one human, but of the human in its most holistic sense. It is to the enrichment and maturation of the totality of relationships through which humanity is expressed that educational change must be addressed.

The realities of accelerating, nonlinear change and complex interdependence can be seen as threatening or as opportune. They clearly threaten the positive outcomes of continuing to valorize self-interested action, control, and competition; disclosing their manifest liabilities as predicaments increasingly displace problems as the primary structures of trouble and suffering. But they are also realities that very clearly pose the question of how most skillfully and appreciatively to differ. We are now witnessing the birth of a world that commends—even commands—expanding concerns about qualities of relationship, continuously generating opportunities for enhancing diversity in the achievement of more equitable and sustainable interdependence. Our present situation affords considerable opportunity, then, for opening very real “spaces for hope” in our midst.

There is, however, nothing certain about our capabilities for or our commitments to working out from these spaces with sufficient shared wisdom, attentive mastery, and moral clarity to realize the kind of interdepen-

dence in which relating freely is truly possible for each of us and for all. To paraphrase Chan master Mazu, activating this possibility will require realizing together a virtuosic harmony of bodies and heart-minds that expands outward through the myriad limbs of the body politic to “benefit what cannot be benefited and do what cannot be done.” As a means to this end, education cannot but fail. Education can, however, demonstrate the meaning of such transformative and fully embodied virtuosity: the alleviation and eventual elimination of relational impoverishment.

### Notes

1. For these and other chilling statistics, see the 2000 *Global Development Report* of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).
2. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
3. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), p. xii.
4. Ibid., p. 293.
5. *Anguttara Nikāya* VI.45.
6. *Digha Nikāya* 21.
7. Traditionally, wisdom (*pañña*) is defined as knowledge of the waning of *āsa-vas*. That is, wisdom arises with the dissolution of habitual *akusala* patterns of awareness and relationship.
8. *Digha Nikāya* 26.
9. Kieran Egan sees these three strands of educational theory and practice as being both in competition in modern schools and fundamentally incompatible—a recipe for educational disaster. See Kieran Egan, *The Educated Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
10. Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
11. James Beniger, *The Control Revolution, Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).
12. Peter Ramus, *Professio regia* (Basle: Thomas Fregius Publisher, 1576).
13. See, for example, William E. Doll, Jr., “Ghosts and the Curriculum,” in William E. Doll and Noel Gough eds., *Curriculum Visions* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), p. 35.
14. It is important that, while complicated systems resist predictive analysis because of the sheer number of variables involved, with sufficient time and sufficient resources their behavior can be accurately anticipated within reasonable statistical parameters. By contrast, complex systems are liable to exhibiting behavior that is in principle impossible to anticipate.
15. For an overview of “downward causation” as a critical concept, see Peter Bogh Andersen with Claus Emmeche, Niels Ole Finnemann, and Peter Voetmann Chistiansen et al., eds., *Downward Causation: Minds, Bodies, and Matter* (Århus: Århus University Press, 2000).
16. To give a recent example, the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War was not predicted by even the most astutely equipped experts. Yet the

collapse made perfect sense, after the fact, of relational dynamics that had been playing out over decades in political, economic, and social arenas.

17. More precisely, predicaments are not open to solution except at the cost of silencing one or more stakeholders in the situation, precluding the possibility of dissent with respect to meaning through, for example, unilateralism and forced universalism. But silencing opposition, in the larger scheme of things, is to limit situational resources. It is, in Buddhist terms, to deny a situation's emptiness or capacity for supporting infinitely complex, mutual contributions to shared meaning and, as a predicament response strategy, is severely liable to ironic outcomes.

18. For a discussion of this historical sequence, see Peter D. Hershock, *Reinventing the Wheel: A Buddhist Response to the Information Age* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

19. This is not, of course, the only result. The breakdown of traditional socioeconomic and cultural structures served also to dissolve, over time, many long-entrenched hierarchies, most prominently perhaps those associated with gender, religious affiliation, and ethnicity. Many *kusala* eventualities have come of this process—a remarkable opening of contributory possibilities for those in traditionally subordinate roles. But the dissolution of old hierarchies is no insurance against other, perhaps less visible and yet more pernicious hierarchies emerging as a result of being informed by *akusala* dispositions and patterns of relationship.

20. The relationship among the global economy, labor, and education is a key contemporary predicament in which efforts to bring about labor reform and universal access to education are liable to having complex and at times ironic consequences. For a sharp assertion of the need—from the perspective of the global majority—for delinking education and competent entry into the global labor market, see Madhu Suri Prakash and Gustavo Esteva, *Escaping Education: Living as Learning within Grassroots Cultures* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998).

21. In making this distinction between freedom as power and freedom as strength, I am drawing on James Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

22. Genius, here, is to be understood as having the root connotation of generative strength or meaningful creativity.